

E. VILLAGE BIKE BAZAAR

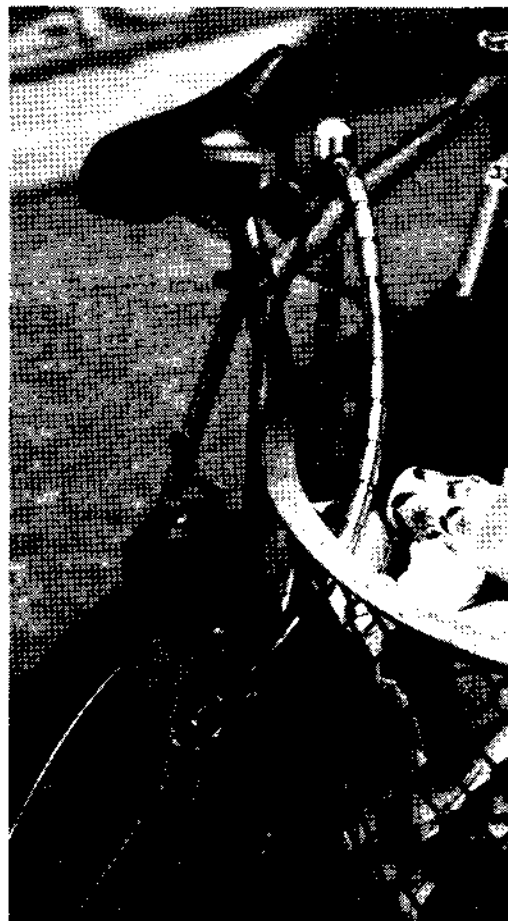
By Robert Cummings and Frank Gresham

Saint Mark's Place in the East Village is NYC's bike bazaar. On any given night, a brace of bicycles is for sale at astonishingly low prices. Most of the bikes, of course, are stolen.

On a summer evening recently, one of us, on foot, saw a black Diamond Back mountain bike being pried off a sign post on lower Broadway. He gave chase, but the thief escaped on the bike, clutching the pipe he had used to break its lock. Two days later, the bike was on sale at St. Mark's Place -- asking price \$200, around one-fourth the retail price. The young man selling the bike refused to give a phone number where he could be reached later; nor would he agree to meet the following night to close the deal.

The St. Mark's bike merchants make deals that would make Crazy Eddie's head spin. All sales are final, and none of the vendors have permanent addresses.

Police acknowledge that there is a brisk trade in hot bikes on St. Mark's. But without proof that the goods are stolen, they can't arrest individuals for selling bicycles on the street.



bikes for free at their local precinct with their social security number and another form of ID. (Call ahead to find out when the community affairs officer is on duty.)

Meanwhile the bike bazaar thrives. Although cops move through St. Mark's Place on their regular beat, no squad is assigned to monitor bike sales. 10th St. and Ave. A and the corner of 7th and C are also active markets, Detective Johnson said. With budget constraints on police, hot bikes will be sold "so long as people are willing to purchase stolen property."

But buying hot bikes doesn't always pay. J, a veteran racer and bike messenger told *City Cyclist* that when his top-of-the-line Cannondale got ripped off, "I told enough people so that when someone bought it, I would hear about it." Sure enough, a few days later J heard from the grapevine that a young woman had bought the bike on St. Mark's, for \$175. "I phoned her and described the bike -- frame, components, the works. She could see it was mine, and she gave it back." Now poorer by \$175, she may think twice before buying another hot bike.

Photo by Charles Komanoff

"How do we know who the bikes belong to?" asked Detective Richard Johnson of the 9th Precinct. "We've got four bikes out in the alley on their way to the property clerk." One of the bikes was impounded in an argument on St. Mark's. Neither man in the dispute could prove ownership, Johnson explained, so the bike was impounded. If it remains unclaimed, it will be sold at the next NYPD bimonthly auction for unclaimed bikes.

NYPD precincts administer a voluntary registration program to help riders identify their bicycles in the event of theft. "If there's an ID number on the bike there's a possibility of identifying the owner," Johnson said. Cyclists can register their

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